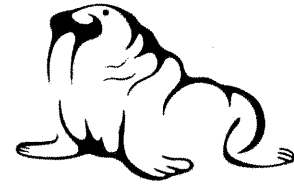


Eskimo Walrus Commission

Quarterly Report 01/1/17-03/31/17

Cooperative Agreement Award F14AC01135



Eskimo Walrus Commission

"To protect the pacific walrus population."

The Eskimo Walrus Commission (EWC) represents 19 walrus hunting coastal communities in Western and Northern Alaska. EWC employs 2 staff positions (Director and EWC Specialist) to maintain daily office operations.

The following highlights administrative activities to date:

- January – March 2017, EWC staff continued meeting with Kawerak leadership and organizations throughout the state to increase awareness of the ivory ban laws that includes walrus ivory being passed throughout the United States. EWC also participated in an "Ivory Ban Workgroup" session on January 20 hosted by Kawerak in Nome with other participants and developed a strategic plan for the year. EWC provided a letter of support to Senator Donny Olson's Senate Joint Resolution 4 (SJR#4) that urged "Alaska Congressional delegation to introduce legislation to provide exemption of legally acquired ivory" and testified at a hearing sponsored by Olson on March 28. EWC continues to work on this critical issue and remains committed to protect the right of Alaska Natives to carve and sell legitimate walrus ivory arts and crafts.
- In latter part of January 2017, EWC Specialist Katya Wassillie resigned to complete her MA degree through UAF. The position was advertised in-house at Kawerak shortly after. On March 13, Cindy Wieler applied for the position and a recommendation was made to hire her which was approved by Kawerak administration. Cindy officially began working as EWC Specialist on April 3, 2017.
- EWC Director attended the Alaska Marine Science Symposium on Jan. 22-27 in Anchorage, met with various research project PIs and met briefly with Patrick Lemons to discuss draft SSA report and requested an extension for EWC comments/recommendations on the report to Feb. 10 – request approved.
- January 23, EWC Director met with Andrea Medeiros of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Public Affairs office to review/discuss "draft communication strategy for Point Lay" and develop a plan for including haul-out and stewardship information on the EWC website. EWC staff continues to work on developing the content for the website, but was able to travel to Point Lay due to schedule conflicts to meet with the tribe directly regarding these efforts.
- Due to agreement budget constraints, EWC was unable to attend spring 2017 hunter meetings in Gambell and Savoonga in February 2017.
- March 9-10, EWC Director attended the Marine Mammal Advisory Council meetings in Gambell and Savoonga with Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to review 2016 harvest season and monitoring activities, discussed proposed language for struck/loss, draft memo with recommendations for sharing the ordinances with other communities, and update report on documenting history of the ordinances by WCS.
- March 21-23, EWC Director attended the Arctic Marine Mammal Coalition and Arctic Waterways Safety Committee (AWSC) meetings in Juneau where draft Standards of Care for vessels and AWSC by-laws were discussed. Through these forums work continues to insure that mariners continue to operate safely in arctic waters and minimize conflicts between subsistence hunting and other users of the waterways. EWC also attended the spring meeting of IPCoMM board and discussed polar bear management and various issues related to co-management and funding concerns.
- EWC continues to work with Strategies 360, a communications firm based in Anchorage, on a social media audit to improve EWC outreach efforts, is close to finalizing the EWC newsletter and forwarded a mailing list for the newsletter to Strategies.
- In February, EWC staff provided a cover letter with a brief summary of key areas on the draft Species Status Assessment for Pacific Walrus from USFWS based on initial comments from 3 reviewers approved by USFWS as part of the ongoing Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing determination. In early April, EWC provided a cover letter with additional comments based on 2 reviewers that identified some deficiencies and informational gaps in various sections of the draft report.
- Worked with new program manager at National Fish and Wildlife to revise remaining budget of \$50K for St. Lawrence Island tribal marine mammal ordinance work and local monitor work and extended project

to May 31, 2017. Final revisions to budget were submitted again and currently waiting for approval from NFWF before notifying Native Village of Gambell to proceed with spring 2017 monitor work and advisory council joint meeting plans.

On-going Tasks:

- Continue to communicate with USFWS and Kawerak leadership on long-term agreement budget shortfalls and work toward financially stabilizing EWC
- Continue to consult with USFWS on the ESA listing determination for Pacific walrus to ensure that the subsistence community is properly involved in the process and that the Traditional Knowledge research conducted for this decision is done correctly and meaningfully including discussions on the potential management structure for walrus if listed under the ESA.
- Respond to media inquiries as they arise regarding incidents related to walrus and the impacts of climate change on walrus population and communities
- Remain proactive in discussions/meetings regarding increased vessel traffic in the Arctic through AMMC, AWSC, and other forums, as well as discussions on other impacts to walrus and subsistence communities, including climate change and ocean acidification
- Continue working with the Native Villages of Gambell and Savoonga to seek multi-year funds to discuss capacity building for the local management structure, the potential expansion of the Tribal Marine Mammal Ordinances, and review/finalize a 5-year sustainable plan
- Contact other marine mammal commissions to coordinate EWC attendance at their annual meetings and communicate with EWC Commissioners on potential issues on which EWC can propose to collaborate
- Continue working with Strategies 360 on an updated EWC website and communications infrastructure, as well as media training

Significant Impacts to the Region

The lack of involvement by the subsistence community in the ESA listing determination process currently underway for Pacific walrus remains a concern to EWC for its potential impact to coastal communities that rely on this resource. EWC is committed to insure that local hunters and their voices are included within the full ESA regulatory process of Pacific walrus so that the final result or findings does not impact the food security of subsistence users. EWC also wholeheartedly advocates for protecting the livelihood of Alaska Native residents and artists who rely on marine mammal products including walrus ivory in their arts and handicrafts as it is critical to Alaska cultural and economic dependence on Arctic marine mammals.

Conclusion

EWC remains committed to be actively involved in co-management activities related to the Pacific walrus, including seeking adequate funds to incorporate the interests of Alaska Natives to self-manage and to offer research opportunities to federal agencies and other organizations. EWC is continually working to make progress on the strategic initiatives identified in the 2013 EWC Vision Navigation workshop, and remain an effective organization in a changing political, environmental, and social Arctic environment.